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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1968 VOL. 23, NO. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

DEADLY CONSCIENCE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

In the swamplands, a cornered fugitive sought to gun down the man who had ruined his life, and Mike Shayne, remembering his promise to a girl's battered, dead body, took on his most dangerous, bullet-studded quest of all.

..... 2 to 51

FEATURED LONG STORIES

THE NEW HAND	
RICHARD DEMING	62
WEARING OF THE GREEN	
JACK RITCHIE	94

NEW THRILLING STORIES

THE DISMAL FLATS MURDER	
JOSEPH PAYNE BRENNAN	52
KING OF THE KENNEL	
JOHN LUTZ	78
NIGHT GAMES	
ED LACY	86
THE RICHEST GIRL IN TOWN	
DEANE and DAVID HELLER	108
RENT MONEY	
HAL ELLSON	120
AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART	
HENRY SLESAR	124

LEO MARGULIES
Publisher
CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director
HOLMES TAYLOR
Associate Editor

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WEARING OF THE GREEN

by JACK RITCHIE

They had many things in common, these two. Unfaithful wives, debts beyond hope of paying, hatreds beyond belief. The kind of hatreds that only complete flight could cure. Or maybe a little bit of murder.



I RAISED AN eyebrow when Harold Winster said, "I would like to disappear."

He nodded. "So I decided to consult an expert. I mean that, as a detective, you must regularly find people who drop out of sight and therefor it appears reasonable to me that you also ought to know how to go about making them disappear. And beyond recall. I have no desire at all ever to be found again."

"Why do you want to disappear?"

He fielded the question. "Just why do people intentionally vanish?"

I shrugged. "Because they stole something, can't stand their wives, are head-over-heels in debt, and, of course, miscellaneous."

Harold Winster was a slope-shouldered man who appeared to have endured much.

"It's my wife," he said. "She's

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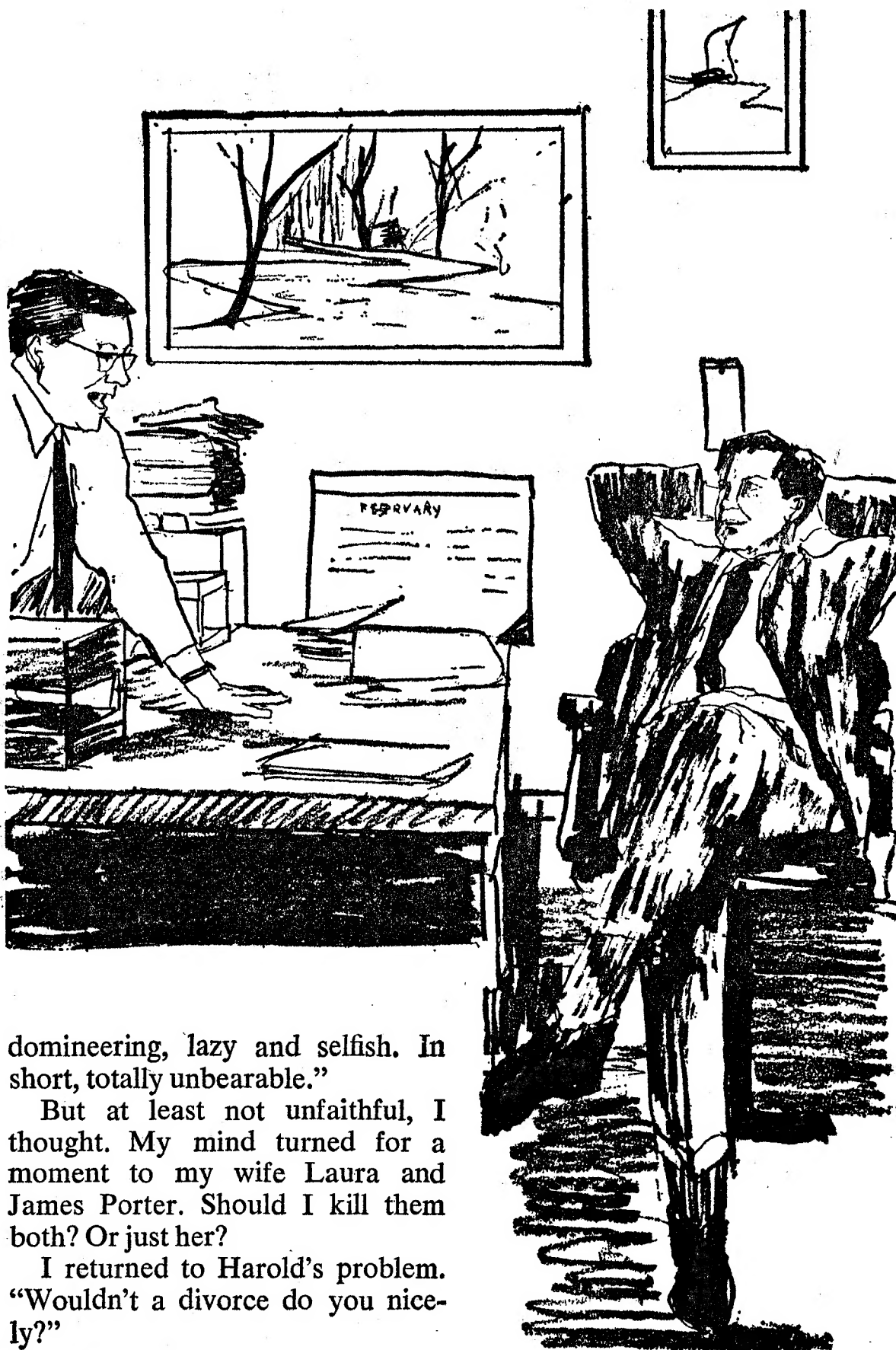
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She's

domineering, lazy and selfish. In short, totally unbearable."

But at least not unfaithful, I thought. My mind turned for a moment to my wife Laura and James Porter. Should I kill them both? Or just her?

I returned to Harold's problem. "Wouldn't a divorce do you nicely?"



"I've talked to my wife on that point and she has promised to cause all the trouble possible if I try to get one. And believe me, she can cause trouble. No, I think the safest thing to do is for me simply to disappear."

I studied him for a few moments. "What makes you think that I would help you to run away from your wife? Doesn't that strike you as being unethical?"

He smiled faintly. "Mr. Carson, I have seen your name mentioned in the newspapers. Never favorably. Unless you are a completely misjudged man, one gets the impression that ethical practice is not your strong point."

Winster, of course, was under the impression that he was speaking to Charles Carson, whose name was lettered on the door.

My name is also Carson. Edward Carson. Charles Carson was my uncle.

This day had really begun with the telephone call to my apartment at ten that morning.

"Are you Edward Paul Carson?" the voice had asked.

"Yes," I said. "Who is this?"

"My name is Villars. I'm calling for the Memorial Hospital. Are you related to or acquainted with a Charles Frederick Carson?"

"Yes. He's my uncle. What's happened?"

"I'm afraid that he's passed away. Heart attack. Your name was among those in his wallet and

since your surnames were identical; I thought I'd try you first. Was he married?"

"No," I said. "I'm his only living relative."

I had been somewhat saddened by the news, but no more than that. Uncle Charley and I had not been particularly close and I knew very little concrete about him except that he made his living as a private detective.

I remembered him as portly, florid, and effusive. He had acquired the habit of expensive clothes and wore a huge diamond ring.

Villars cleared his throat and continued. "We'd like you to come down here, if you would. To positively identify the body, you know, and make the arrangements."

"Of course," I said. "I'll be there in half an hour."

Laura came into the room. "Who was that?"

"Memorial Hospital," I said. "My Uncle Charley died. I'll have to take care of things."

Laura had dark hair and cool eyes. "Is he the one with the big diamond ring?"

"The same."

It was my day off and I hadn't shaved yet. That accomplished, I went down to the apartment building garage.

At the hospital, I made certain that it was indeed Uncle Charley and then followed Villars to his office.

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He appeared to serve the hospital in some kind of an administrative capacity.

"The death occurred at eighty-three this morning. Apparently he was having breakfast in some diner." He checked the address. "Seven-sixteen East Mason."

After a moment, the number registered with me. "He had his office in the building."

I rubbed my neck. "This matter of arranging things. I've never done anything like that before."

"Simply select a funeral director. He will take care of most things. But of course you will have to see to the other less immediate items. Settling his estate and things like that."

I selected a funeral director at random from the telephone book. After placing the matter in his hands, I went back to my car.

What was I supposed to do now? Inform his friends? I hadn't the faintest notion of who any of them might be.

I would certainly have to see his landlord and also take care of closing his office.

716 East Mason was not far away and I stopped there first.

It was a five-story building in the older section of the city and the street floor was occupied by a variety of commercial establishments, including a drugstore, a diner, a shoe store, and a discount house.

I was conscious of hunger and

also curiosity. I entered the diner and ordered coffee and a sandwich.

I was the only customer at the moment and the proprietor soon proceeded to detail the excitement of the morning.

"He was a private eye," he said. "Used to eat here a lot. Name was Charley Carson."

"I know," I said. "He was my uncle."

He seemed surprised, as though my being there could be classified as a coincidence. "Well, what do you know." He went to the hat rack and brought back a tan top coat and a hat. "Charley left his coat and hat here. I mean in all the excitement, I forgot to tell the ambulance people to take his stuff along." He hesitated. "You really his nephew?"

I showed him my driver's license and that seemed to satisfy him.

When I finished the sandwich, I picked up the hat and coat and left. A dozen feet to the right took me to the main entrance of the building and I entered a small dingy vestibule.

The wall directory informed me that Uncle Charley had an office on the third floor. I decided that I might as well go up there and tell his secretary, just in case she didn't know of his death yet.

When I tried the door to his office, I discovered that it was locked. Evidently his secretary al-

ready knew about Uncle Charley and had left.

I shifted Uncle Charley's top coat to my other arm and the jingling of keys got my attention. I investigated and brought out two key rings. One obviously held the keys to his car. Probably it was parked in the neighborhood. I would have to see about storing it or something.

The other ring contained some half a dozen or more keys and they were likely for his office and his apartment.

I hesitated briefly and then resorted to the ring of keys until I found one that operated the lock and opened the outer office door.

Charley's suite, if one could call it that, consisted of one small waiting room and an equally small office beyond. Both rooms were clean, but the smell of an aged building lingered.

The inner office furniture consisted of one desk, two chairs, and a three-drawer filing cabinet.

I found myself going through the drawers of the desk, but there was nothing of particular interest and I looked toward the filing cabinets.

As far as I knew, Uncle Charley made a living and that was just about all of it. And yet there was that large diamond ring and I did remember that Uncle Charley always drove a big new car.

I moved to the filing cabinet. As I expected, it was locked, but one

of Uncle Charley's keys eliminated that problem.

I paged through some of the manila folders. It appeared that Uncle Charley had had a varied and interesting clientele.

After a while I had closed the file drawers and had been sitting in Uncle Charley's chair mulling over the subject of Uncle Charley's income, when Harold Winster had rapped lightly on the glass-paned door that separated me from the waiting room.

I suppose I should have informed him immediately that I was not Charles Carson, but I had been curious about the kind of people who would come to Uncle Charley, and I thought that just listening for a few minutes might do no harm.

And then, of course, Harold Winster had given me a pleasant new idea.

"How long have you been married?" I now asked.

"Twelve years. I tried awfully hard to adjust, Mr. Carson. But it was impossible. For the last eight years I've been planning to leave her."

"Planning for eight years?" I asked him.

"Well, not exactly planning. Getting ready is more like it. You see, I wanted to arrange things first. Get the mortgage paid off, you know. And I'm leaving behind a fair-sized bank account, some bonds, and, of course, the

checking car. It's t

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checking account. And also the car. It's this year's model."

"Just what in the world do you intend to take with you when you leave?"

"Only the clothes one suitcase will hold and two hundred dollars."

"That's noble of you," I said and we both knew I didn't mean it.

He flushed. "Not noble, of course. It's just that I have a very low guilt threshold about running away."

I moved Uncle Charley's ash tray a few inches to the right. "It seems a pity that you must abandon the house, the car, those bonds, and the checking and saving accounts to a woman who obviously doesn't deserve them. You did slave years and years to accumulate those things, didn't you?"

He sighed. "I even moonlighted."

I used a soft approach. "Have you ever considered—for a fleeting moment—of doing away with your wife?"

His eyes flickered. "How could you possibly suggest something as extreme as that? Besides, I could never get away with it."

"Some men do."

"I'd be the most logical suspect."

"Of course."

There was a silence.

"I'd need an absolutely airtight alibi," he said.

I nodded.

He leaned forward slightly. "You don't suppose that a person could hire somebody to do a thing like murder?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," I said.

He stared at me reproachfully and evidently felt that he had been led on.

I moved the ashtray to the left this time. "Have you ever considered trading murders?"

He frowned. "Trading murders? You mean like I murder your wife and you murder mine?"

"It's something to think about."

He thought about it and began to perspire slightly. "I think it's better if I just disappear."

"Of course," I said. I pulled some paper toward me and reached for the desk pen. "Your full name and address, please?"

He gave them to me. "I know that the actual disappearance is really simple. Just a matter of getting on a bus, or train, or plane and traveling to another part of

the country. Thousands of people do it every year. No, my real problem is in assuming a new identity. After all, I do not intend to become a hermit. And in this modern day and age, all sorts of papers and certificates seem to be necessary in order to prove that one exists."

I agreed and said, "Frankly, I've never helped anyone disappear before. I'll have to give it some study. Could you come back here Wednesday? Say about eleven?"

He nodded. "How much will this cost me?"

"I'm sure that we can come to some agreement that will satisfy the both of us."

His eyes seemed to search the office. "You don't happen to have a picture of her, do you?"

"A picture of whom?"

"Your wife."

"The frame was damaged," I said. "I'm having it repaired. Perhaps the job will be done by Wednesday."

When he was gone, I sat back in Uncle Charley's chair.

Laura had married me principally as a base of operations for something better. I had not, obviously, been aware of that at the beginning of our marriage.

The fact gradually dawned upon me when I noticed that Laura made a point of learning about the men we met at our social functions, with particular emphasis

upon their financial stature. Not that our social life existed on too high a level—I was, after all, just an accountant with the Bradley Construction Company—but here and there we did touch the higher circles.

As time passed, Laura became increasingly cool toward me and the situation progressed to unexplained absences and outright lies.

In short, the whole scene began to look very fishy indeed. Another man?

I considered first in going to Uncle Charley and asking him to investigate. However, further thought convinced me that it might be better to have someone neutral do the work.

The Wells Agency, Confidential Investigations, quickly confirmed the fact that Laura did indeed have an extra-curricular interest, and that being one James Wilson, a vice-president with Bradley Construction with a salary twice that of my own.

That was the key to Laura, I thought. Not really men, but money. Probably she could be true to that.

Naturally I had been furious when I learned about the affair. My first impulse had been to shoot both of them.

But as I thought about it more, I hesitated. It would be satisfying to give Laura and Wilson what they deserved, but on the other hand, how long would the accomplish-

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No, there was no need in being a fool. The murders of my wife and Wilson would have to be done skillfully and safely.

But how? That had been the problem.

The phone at my elbow rang and I picked it up.

"Charley?" the voice asked.

"I'm sorry," I said, "But Charley isn't here. Who is this?"

He was a bit cautious. "Who are you?"

"Charley's nephew."

He decided to trust me—to a limited extent, anyway. "Okay. This is Pinky Muller. When Charley comes in, tell him I called and have him phone back."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Muller, but I'm afraid that my uncle will not be in. Ever."

There was a pause. "What do you mean?"

"He died this morning. Heart attack."

He absorbed the information. "Gee, I'm sorry to hear that. I always thought of him as my best. . . ." He sighed. "Well, that's the way it goes. Here today and gone tomorrow. I'll watch the obituaries and send flowers."

When he hung up, I locked the office and drove to Uncle Charley's apartment building. I used one of his keys to unlock the door.

It was a one-room efficiency apartment. I opened the small re-



frigerator in the kitchenette. Uncle Charley had evidently done his eating out. It contained only one six-pack of beer with one can missing.

I sat down in the only arm chair and looked about the main room. Nothing much here.

My mind went to Uncle Charley's diamond ring. Probably it would go to me.

What would be the procedure? Probate or something like that? And how long would it take? Would I have to sell it in order to pay the inheritance taxes? searching the room, not quite sure of what I was looking for.

I found nothing.

I got out of the chair and began

Obviously Uncle Charley was not the type to hide money in his mattress. If he had money. And I hadn't found any bank book. Just a monthly statement concerning Charley's checking account. As of the previous month, he was worth \$273.86.

I reached into my pocket for a handkerchief and my fingers touched the key rings again. I brought them out.

That little one. A safety deposit box key?

I drove to the national bank in which Charley kept his checking account and signed the book with his name.

In the vault, I matched the key number to a box and opened it.

LAURA TRIED ON the new chin-chilla.

"If I doesn't fit," I said, "I'll take it back to the store."

"It fits," she said. "Where did you get the money?"

"Never mind about that," I said. "Let me do the worrying about finances."

"Like hell." She looked at me. "Have you been embezzling from the company?"

"No," I said. "Absolutely not. I swear it."

Her eyes narrowed. "Did your Uncle Charley leave you a bundle?"

I put the tissue paper back into the long box. "When Uncle Charley died, he had less than three

hundred dollars in his checking account."

"He didn't impress me as being that poor."

"Well, he did make some money, but he spent it as fast as it came in."

"What about that big diamond ring?"

"Made of glass," I said. "Or whatever they make imitations out of these days."

She was persistent. "Then where the devil did you get the money?"

"Laura," I said. "Sometimes it's better not to know too much. If you are ever questioned by the Internal Rev—" I closed the box. "I mean that the best way to keep out of trouble, if there should be trouble, is to know nothing."

She stared at me. "There's going to be trouble?"

"No," I said. "I'm positive there won't be. But still, I think it's better to be safe, don't you?"

After a while, she smiled faintly. "We'll have it your way. For now, at least."

Harold Winster kept his Wednesday appointment.

He scowled. "You're not Charles Carson. I read the obituaries."

"Charles Carson was my uncle," I said. "And I've taken over his business. I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. My name is Edward Carson."

He made the adjustment and looked about the office again. "I don't see her picture."

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"The shop hasn't finished repairing the frame yet," I said.

Harold sighed. "Well, about my disappearance. Do we invent a name for me? And forge identification papers?"

"No," I said. "No forgeries. It's always better to be someone who actually exists, just in case someone wants to check. How old are you?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Now that we're going to give you a new identity," I said, "Would you like to be older or younger?"

He reflected a moment. "No. I think thirty-eight fits me just about right."

I took him to my car and we drove to the public library, where we consulted a newspaper for the year 1928. I turned to the birth announcements. "Choose a father," I said.

He studied the list. "I've always admired the Irish. Patrick Aloysius O'Brien seems rather nice. But we still don't know what my own name would be. It just says *Sons Born To* and gives no further information."

When the librarian brought the city directory for the year 1930 from the vault, we looked up Patrick Aloysius O'Brien and found that he resided at 136 W. Galena Street. As of that year, he was the father of eight children, the two-year-old being Michael Byrnes O'Brien.

Harold repeated the name.

"Michael Byrnes O'Brien. I rather like that. It sings."

I turned to the latest directory and found that Michael Byrnes O'Brien still lived in the city and was now himself the father of three girls. I copied down the address.

We went back to my car.

Harold was thoughtful as I drove. "I've been thinking about the car."

"Car? What car?"

"My car," Harold said. "Really the best one I've ever had. And it's free and clear."

"You'll have to leave it behind," I said. "It's registered in your name and so is the license. You could be traced through that."

He agreed, but sadly. "I guess you're right."

I passed what should have been 136 W. Galena Street. Now that space and the lots adjacent were occupied by a large supermarket. Here and there family houses still remained, but it was clear that things change and the area was converting to high-rise apartments.

I circled the neighborhood until I found the nearest Catholic Church. "First we'll get you a baptismal certificate. Tell the priest you lost the original."

Harold worried. "How do we know that Michael Byrnes O'Brien was Catholic?"

I looked at him for a moment and he flushed. "I guess that was a foolish question. But in order to get the baptismal certificate, won't

I have to prove that I'm Michael Byrnes O'Brien?"

"No," I said. "Your word will be enough. Priests don't expect people to lie to them."

Inside the rectory, a young parish priest consulted the baptismal records for the year 1928 to verify the baptism of one Michael Byrnes O'Brien and promptly filled out another baptismal certificate.

On the way out, Harold dropped five dollars in the poor box.

In the car, Harold sighed again. "It's a pity to leave the house to Flora. She never really took much interest in it."

"Forget the house," I said. "You can't take it with you." I looked at him curiously. "You're not thinking of calling this whole thing off, are you?"

"Good Heavens, no," he said firmly. "I couldn't stand that woman for another month. My leaving is the only solution."

"Of course," I said.

Downtown, we parked in a lot near the municipal building and went upstairs to the vital records department.

We approached one of the windows and Harold followed my previous instructions.

"I can't find my damn birth certificate anywhere," he complained. "What do I have to do to get a duplicate?"

"Just what you're doing now," the clerk said. "What's your name?"

"Michael Byrnes O'Brien," Harold said proudly. He gave the address of the bona fide Michael Byrnes O'Brien.

Harold watched the clerk fill out a form. "When you got three daughters running around the house," he said, "something's bound to get lost."

The clerk nodded absently. "Do you have any identification? Letters?"

"Well, no," Harold said. "But I did dig up my baptismal certificate. Will that do?"

The clerk glanced at the slip of paper.

Harold indicated me with a thumb. "Eddie here will vouch for me, won't you, Eddie? We've had desks side by side for fifteen years."

I glanced at my watch. "And we'll be fired side by side if we don't get back before one."

The clerk moved to the rear of his cubicle, consulted a city directory, and appeared satisfied. Five minutes later, Harold had his birth certificate.

We went down the hall into the offices of the motor vehicle department.

Harold approached another clerk. "My name is Michael Byrnes O'Brien. About two weeks ago my pocket was picked. I was hoping that whoever did it would at least have the decency to drop the empty wallet into a mail box, but that hasn't happened. I guess

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I'll need a duplicate of my driver's license."

It was a familiar story to the clerk. He nodded routinely. "Did you bring your birth certificate?"

Our mission there accomplished, we walked toward the elevators.

"What about a social security card?" Harold asked. "Do I get a duplicate?"

"No," I said. "Open an account of your own wherever you decided to settle down."

"Won't the social security people want to know why I waited until I'm thirty-eight before applying?"

"I doubt it. But if they are, just tell them that you never had a so-

cial security card until now because you were living on an independent income. That's gone now and you're forced to go to work."

In our car again, Harold became thoughtful. Finally he said, "The first time we met, you mentioned something about—ah—trading murders?"

"Oh, that," I said. "Just a passing thought. Forget it." I started the car and pulled into traffic. "Basically, I think you are now equipped to disappear. When do you plan on leaving?"

He watched approaching traffic. "Well, in about four or five days. There are a few little things I still have to do and think over." He took a deep breath. "Frankly, I wouldn't mind it in the least if my wife died. Not in the least." He exhaled the air. "I'll see you again before I go. To pay up, you know."

"Let's make that a definite appointment," I said. "I'm not always in my office."

WE GOT INTO the big new car and I pulled away from the curb.

After a while Laura closed her eyes and seemed to bathe in the luxury of the ride.

"How did you like the necklace?" I asked.

"Beautiful."

"The asking price was seventeen thousand," I said.

She smiled.

"I wasn't sure if I should get you pearls instead."

The eyes opened and studied me. "I prefer diamonds."

On Lake Shore Drive I pulled to the side of the road and stopped.

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

"No." I pointed to the large Norman house behind the six-foot iron fence. "How do you like it?"

She stared at it for a few moments and then turned to me.

I smiled and started the engine again. I swung the car into the circular driveway and stopped in front of the main entrance.

"Who owns it?" she asked cautiously.

I took the ring of keys out of my pocket and dangled them in front of her eyes.

"Guess," I said.

After I brought Laura back to the old apartment to arrange for the packing, I went downstairs to the public phone booth and called the Wells Agency once again.

Two days later, Eugene Wells called me in to his office.

He put the tape recorder on his desk and bent down to plug the cord into the outlet. "They met at the Antlers Hotel, as usual."

We sat down and listened to the tape recording.

When it was finished, Wells said, "In the process of calling off the affair, she used rather forceful language, didn't she?"

I agreed. "You don't suppose they'll ever get back together again?"

"Impossible," Wells said. "Not

after the things she called him. And vice versa."

I recalled parts of the recording. "I gather she returned the pearls?"

Wells nodded. "Impetuous action, I'd say. Even though they were cultured, we know that Wilson paid almost five hundred dollars for them." He glanced at the written report. "After she left, Wilson stayed another twenty minutes. It seems that the string broke when she threw the pearls in his face. Took him that long to find all of them again."

HAROLD WINSTER sat down and sighed. "I just can't do it."

"Do what?"

"Kill a strange woman."

"No?"

"No," he said. "After I saw you last time, I looked up your address and went to have a preliminary look at your wife. I knocked on the door of your apartment and pretended to be selling encyclopedias."

"Well?"

"She wasn't interested in encyclopedias. I mean that when I saw her, right then and there I knew that I couldn't possibly kill anyone. I guess that includes my wife."

"But you're still going to leave her?"

"Yes. Murder isn't the only solution."

"Harold," I said. "You're still a sucker."

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After he left, I locked up the office.

I stared at Uncle Charley's name on the frosted glass door.

No, Uncle Charley had left me nothing. His safety deposit box had contained only a few personal papers and the diamond ring was indeed an imitation. When Uncle Charley had earned money, it had gone fast, most of it to Pinky Muller, his bookie.

I went downstairs to my car and began driving.

Harold had said it. "Murder isn't the only solution." And he was right. In the meeting of our minds, I had learned from him. There are sweeter, safer, longer-lasting revenges.

I had had to cash my bonds to make all the down payments and

that was a loss, but I did not regret it.

Soon they would come to take back the diamonds, and the fur coat, and the car, and the clothes. Soon she would learn that I had not bought the house. I had rented it.

All these things had been hers—for a moment—and then they had been taken away.

I smiled.

Yes, Laura would remember me. Always.

I parked my car and got out.

The elderly priest who sat at the desk smoked a briar pipe.

I glanced at the slip of paper in the palm of my hand again.

"My name is Sean Egan O'Herlihy," I said. "I seem to have lost my baptismal certificate and would like to get a replacement."

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